

Criminology Major Gains Valuable Experience at Department of Correction

Media Contact:

Department of Correction

Java Ahmed

(317) 234-1693

E-mail: jahmed@doc.in.gov

Writer:

Brianna Bullerdick, media relations intern,

Indiana State University, (812) 237-3773,

opa@indstate.edu

August 22, 2006

Commissioner Donahue promotes opportunities for talented students

“We welcome internships in the Department of Correction because it allows folks to come in and ask great questions of why we do certain things. It charges our abilities to retool the services we provide instead of always doing it the same old way.”

J. David Donahue,
Commissioner



High profile interviews, mental health evaluations, and clerical work were all part of Katherine Odell's

experience this summer at the Indiana Women's Prison in Indianapolis.

A senior criminology major at Indiana State University, Odell served an internship at the prison's intake unit, through which all women committed to the Indiana Department of Correction must pass.

The internship gave the 2003 Washington High School graduate a wide variety of experiences that could not have been taught at ISU or any other university – and it opened the door to career options she had not previously considered.

“I wanted her to get a realistic view of what it's like to work in a prison, and apply some of the theoretical knowledge she's learned at school to a practical setting,” said Debbie Schneider, director of the intake unit. Women can spend from seven to 14 days in the unit being evaluated. Odell had the chance to sit in on interviews of offenders by prison staff.

“I enjoy working with the ladies; I like getting to talk to them, question them, see what they are thinking,” Odell said. “It is very interesting.”

Particularly interesting, she said, was the opportunity to meet several inmates involved in high profile cases that the public reads about in newspapers or hears about in the community.

Odell also sat in with psychologists and psychiatrists during mental health evaluations involving some of the more difficult cases. She saw some substance abuse groups and other groups run by the mental health personnel at the prison. She was also able to spend a day with a juvenile parole officer to observe what it is like to work in the corrections parole area.

She also experienced the clerical aspect of the job by compiling packets with inmates' information.

“I can make a packet in less than two minutes,” Odell said.

A packet consists of all the information the prison receives including DNA, fingerprints, and medical and psychological pieces.

“We welcome internships in the Department of Correction because it allows folks to come in and ask great questions of why we do certain things. It charges our abilities to retool the services we provide instead of always doing it the same old way,” said J. David Donahue, commissioner of the Indiana Department of Correction.

Having a job that provides such a valuable feature for the safety of others can be stressful. The level of stress often depends on the number of women the prison takes in.

The prison has had several interns throughout the years from different Indiana colleges and Schneider said Odell was one of the best.

“Katie has really stepped up to the plate and handled the stress really well,” Schneider said. “She has been an asset and a help to us in every way.”

The internship may have started as a requirement for graduation, but has since turned into a possible career for Odell.

“When I graduate I plan on applying to a couple of different prisons, which before this internship I never even considered,” she said.

Odell’s internship was made possible by a Focus Indiana Scholarship funded by a gift to Indiana State from the Lilly Endowment.

There are various opportunities for careers in corrections. In addition to correctional officers, the department needs administrators, accountants, academic and medical staff as well as persons with law backgrounds to work in the courts.

“So many learn about corrections by the stereotype portrayed in the media or in movies,” Donahue said. “Unfortunately, people don’t recognize the value that correction brings to public safety.”

Donahue encourages those considering a career in corrections to complete a college degree.

“We love individuals that come in with college degrees because literally every position in the organization is available for a college degree candidate,” he said. “In Indiana, in order to be a facility administrator you must possess a degree. The degree doesn’t have to be in law enforcement or corrections, but it can be in a liberal arts program or a general studies program. The fact that the individual has a degree, the barrier to entry is really negated and they have an opportunity in any area of our business.”

Contact: For information about internships through Indiana State University, contact Diana Cooper-Bolinskey, internship coordinator, ISU Career Center, (812) 237-2586 or dcooperboli@isugw.indstate.edu For information about the Indiana Department of Correction, contact Java Ahmed, director of media and public relations, Indiana Department of Correction, (317)234-1693 or jahmed@doc.in.gov

About The Department of Correction

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department’s home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department’s Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.